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Mrs K Dawkins
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dawkins

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: design and technology (D&T)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 16 and 17 May 2011 to look at work in D&T.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is good.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is good.

- Attainment on entry to the school is below the national average. As a result of good teaching and learning, students' attainment is broadly in line with average by the end of Year 11. A trend of improvement is reflected in D&T GCSE results. Results vary across the specialist courses and action has begun to tackle the problem of girls' low attainment in textiles at Key Stage 4. In lessons, students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress. However, the lack of a secure baseline of students' D&T skills and capabilities hinders the school in identifying where their progress is outstanding.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good and most are beginning to take responsibility for their work. They enjoy the challenge of tasks and the

opportunities to make decisions. This is most evident at Key Stage 3 and was reflected in one student's comment; 'Teachers don't just give us the answers straight away, we have to think things through for ourselves'.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- The use of students undertaking observation of lessons is an outstanding feature and is used effectively to support teachers and students to improve the quality of learning. As a result, almost all students were very clear about what is expected of them in lessons. Positive relationships with students underpinned the good quality of teaching and learning. Teachers' specialist knowledge, good questioning skills and breadth in using a range of teaching methods were used effectively to support students' learning in the best lessons.
- Where lessons were satisfactory, the pace of working slowed in some parts of the task, for example where teachers had not conveyed clearly enough what texture meant, or when some parts of a task lacked relevance for some students. Occasionally, teachers' feedback to students and the quality of students' target-setting were not focused sharply enough on the next steps to make rapid progress and improve attainment.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

The quality of the curriculum in D&T is good.

- Mostly, schemes of work are well planned. They meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and students' needs and interests. Teachers use students' feedback effectively to modernise and bring greater relevance to projects, particularly those with a focus on electronics. An emphasis on sustainability is developing well throughout the schemes of work. The school is aware that opportunities are needed for students to learn about modern and smart materials and to further modernise projects.
- A wide range of visits and challenge activities enriches students' learning. The festive 'Christkindlemarkt' activity makes an effective contribution to students' understanding of what it means to design and make for different clients and markets.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

The effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T is good.

- The subject leader is effective in leading D&T and is well informed about developments in the subject. She has established a shared ethos of continual improvement across the team. Established systems of planning, assessment, health and safety and regular review of the curriculum are in place. Students' views are used effectively to support improvements in teaching and learning and inform decision-making about the curriculum. Monitoring and the evaluation of students' progress take place, but

currently they do not identify clearly enough the strengths and weaknesses in D&T.

- The subject leader is well supported by the senior leadership team. Labour market trends and students' interests are used effectively to inform decisions to introduce new courses to the D&T curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that systems for assessing students' progress are based on identifying what they have achieved from a secure baseline
- refining monitoring and evaluation to ensure that students' strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified by teachers and used consistently to improve the quality of feedback to students and sharper target-setting.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector